

- Arnault, Dr. On the power of resistance to cold of some exotic birds.
- Hugues, A. Our Ornithologists: Jean Crespon (1797-1857); with portrait.
- Millet-Horsin, Dr. A movement from east to west among African birds.
- Seguin-Jard, E. Note on *Otocoris alpestris*.
- Simon, E., and Berlioz, J. Account of a collection of Mexican Humming-birds from the neighbourhood of Orizaba.

Scottish Naturalist, nos. 125/126, May-June, 1922.

- Rintoul, L. J., and Baxter, E. V. Report on Scottish Ornithology in 1921, including migration.

South African Journal of Natural History,

vol. iii. no. 2, March 1922.

- Godfrey, R. Birds of the Buffalo Basin, Cape Province; pt. v.
- Eaton, H. G. Some nesting habits of the Cape Robin.
- Hamer, A. H. Territorialism and Sexual Selection.

XLIII.—*Letters, Extracts, and Notes.*

Cuckoos in the Gambia.

SIR,—The following record of the dates (since 1904) on which I have heard the first Cuckoo (presumably *C. gularis*) in the Gambia seems of sufficient interest to print:—

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|--------|---|---|
| 1904. | May 5. | Lamin Kotto, MacCarthy Island Province. |
| 1906. | May 11. | Sajuka, Niumi, North Bank Province. |
| 1909.* | April 10. | Foni, Kombo and Foni Province. |
| 1910. | April 26. | Niumi, N. B. P. |
| 1911. | April 27. | Barrokunda, South Bank Province. |
| 1912. | (Not heard by May 1, when I left the Colony.) | |
| 1913. | April 19. | Barrokunda, S. B. P. |
| | | (Then an interval till May 4.) |
| 1914. | May 8. | Sutukung, S. B. P. |
| 1918. | April 8. | Jappini, S. B. P. |
| 1919. | April 7. | Jabba, S. B. P. |
| 1920. | April 20. | Kudang, S. B. P. |
| 1921. | April 23. | Bunni, N. B. P. |
| 1922. | April 14. | Sika, N. B. P. |

The rhyme applicable to the European bird will at first fit ours,

“In April come he will,
In May he sings all day,”

but it must continue :

“By first of June,
He’s changed his tune,
And does not fly
In July,”

for I have occasionally seen and heard one calling as late as August, but a very “changed tune” by that time—a very short “cuck” followed by a prolonged “koo-o,” an almost dove-like note.

E. HOPKINSON.

Gambia, West Africa.

30 May, 1922.

A Defence of Egg-collecting.

SIR,—I have read the remarks made by Lord Buxton on the exhibition of clutches of birds’ eggs at the last Oological Dinner, and also the letter in the July ‘*Ibis*’ signed by Messrs. Elwes and Stuart Baker.

It seems to me, however, that some defence of the much abused egg-collector is necessary against the attacks levelled by Lord Buxton and others, and, so far, I have not seen any attempt at this.

Although the point is much debated, let it be admitted that the collecting of eggs is of comparatively little scientific value. Let it also be admitted that it involves some cruelty, though of this more anon.

It must also be admitted that most forms of sport also, including hunting, fishing, and shooting, involve far more cruelty, and are just as needless. Yet I trust that few of us would like to see these sports abolished. Fish could be netted and killed quickly in preference to “playing” them : foxes could be shot : birds could be killed in some manner which precluded all chance of their being left to a slow and

lingering death, as occasionally happens. Yet if, as I consider justifiably, we allow such pursuits on the grounds of sport, health, and exercise, why strive to deny to others, who cannot afford such expensive forms of sport, the pleasure of their hobby?

Many clutches of eggs I have collected bring back memories of happy days by moor, wood, or stream, pitting one's intelligence against that of the birds, and learning much of interest from their habits. Such memories have the same satisfaction as those of a good run; of a fish hooked and landed, of a tall rocketeer neatly killed.

I am only concerned in defending the *rational* egg-collector, who only takes such clutches as he requires, and often, at considerable sacrifice, leaves others he covets, as the taking of them might do harm.

The time-worn lines of attack are that egg-collecting is cruel, and deprives others of the delights of bird-life. I trust I may be permitted to deal with these arguments as briefly as possible.

It is idle to say that birds like their eggs being taken. It is, however, just as false to say their grief is inconsolable. A little observation will show the comparatively small concern birds have for their eggs compared to their young.

Any ornithologist knows for what slight reasons many birds will desert their eggs; indeed, it sometimes seems for no reason. Eggs are inanimate, and if the situation of the nest is unsuitable, or appears dangerous, instinct apparently teaches that it is better to desert the eggs than risk peril to the young. Compare with this the behaviour of birds when they have young, and further proof of the degree of affection felt for the two is unnecessary. Most birds will face very little peril for their eggs, while they will readily risk grave danger for their young.

Birds will sing the day after the eggs have been taken, and most species will again begin to nest in a few days.

Similarly, the argument regarding the diminution of our birds by egg-collecting is greatly overstated.

The large majority of birds will, provided the complete

clutch be taken, nest again, and the number of young reared in the year will be precisely the same. Those which do not nest a second time are known to the *rational* egg-collector, who frequently is at great pains to see they are not disturbed. Further, let it be remembered that a series of thirty clutches of the Tree-Pipit possibly represents a selection from over a hundred clutches, found during many years. I have a series of some fourteen clutches of this species myself, taken in five different countries, and assert confidently that by taking these I did not diminish the yearly number of birds reared. It is not the rational egg-collector who is diminishing the numbers of our birds, and the blame should be put on the right shoulders.

Those who do real damage to our bird-life are the school-boy, the collector who cannot pass any nest without taking it, the keeper who has virtually exterminated many of our nobler birds of prey, and the many "sportsmen" who shoot every rarer visitor to our shores.

The blame for taking the last Osprey's nest in Britain is rightly attributed to an irresponsible egg-collector. Yet the fact that this was the last nest, and that the value of "British taken" eggs is high to some collectors, is entirely due to the keeper and game-preserve. There are many who would just as soon see some of our nobler birds of prey than listen to our smaller feathered songsters.

It is most justifiable to check and discourage the irresponsible collector and the schoolboy from damaging nests unreasonably, but I cannot see that this is sufficient reason for trying to deprive the serious collector of a comparatively harmless form of sport, which affords many hours of healthy exercise in the spring and pleasant evenings in the winter, especially when, as is often the case, he cannot afford the more expensive and popular forms.

Yours faithfully,

R. F. MEIKLEJOHN.

18 Kentmann Street,
Reval, Esthonia.
22 July, 1922.

Nesting in Esthonia.

SIR,—I send you herewith two skins of *Colæus monedula collaris*, which are typical of the Esthonian birds, and which I shot near Wesenberg, Esthonia. I think they are a pair from a clutch of six eggs which I took. The female I am sure of, and nearly sure of the male. Possibly they may be of some interest. I am afraid I have to record a disappointing spring. Everything was very late, and there was still snow at the beginning of May. As a consequence the early birds were, with few exceptions, late in nesting, and the later ones started at the same time, and the season was very short. Further, I could not get away much, and one cannot get anybody else to collect here. Koch, who was going to help me, has been detained in Germany by his wife's health. I got a Goshawk and three eggs, a Hawfinch and six, but only took two, as it is only recorded as a "doubtful breeding species here," and unluckily somebody else took the others. I found a Scarlet Grosbeak and one egg, the rest having been taken. Got c./6 and c./5 Northern Bullfinch: Marsh, Great, and Willow Tit: Great Crested Grebe: Garganey: Little Tern: Pochar'd, etc. Found a c./5 Woodchat Shrike, but these were just hatching. A forester sent Mr. Weltz two clutches of Great Snipe (four each), but packed them so badly that they were all hopelessly broken. However, he writes that the way to find them is to go out just after heavy rain, and then the bird gets straight off the nest. I hope to try again next year. I went down to Hapsaal purposely to get *Erolia alpina* (which, despite Hartert, I and all here say is "*schintzi*").

I could not get away till the beginning of June, and after much hunting found three nests, all with the young just hatched or hatching. They must have begun almost before the snow was off the ground. Got two nice blue clutches of Black-headed Gull and a c./3 Common Tern, with two blue and one whitish egg.

If I am still here next year, as I expect to be, I must hope for more luck. I failed to get either Melodious Warbler or

Siskin. The latter were nesting in some numbers in the tall forests near Kono, and at Wesenberg, but I could not spot them. The former I thought I had got in my garden, where a bird is always singing—a nest at the top of an apple-tree, about 15 ft. from the ground, and near where I found the nest last year with young. I got up to it, and to my surprise found it was a Garden Warbler. One rather interesting thing is that in my aviary here, on the verandah, I have got a pair of Northern Bullfinches to nest, and the hen is sitting on four eggs. I cannot see them well, but I fear they all look “miniatures” and not much larger than Titmice eggs. I hope I am wrong, as one learns so much by watching the nesting operations in captivity. I notice the male takes no share in incubation.

I have been trying to get skins of the Buzzards here, but now all properties have been confiscated and divided up, the birds of prey get no peace, and are already very scarce. I found a pair of *Buteo* nesting, but they were undoubtedly *Buteo buteo*. The interesting question is whether the smaller form is “*vulpinus*” or “*zimmermanni*.”

R. F. MEIKLEJOHN.

18 Kentmann Street,
Reval, Esthonia.
9 July, 1922.

White-tailed Eagle on the Bass Rock.

SIR,—In the first part of the ‘*Ootheca Wolleyana*,’ published in 1864, the following statement occurs on page 49 among the notes on the White-tailed or Sea-Eagle, viz., “It used to build on the Bass Rock, and long ago had two breeding-places in Dumfriesshire [Mag. Nat. Hist. ser. 2, vol. i. pp. 119 and 444], and even near Glasgow.” A number of years ago I endeavoured to find out what historic or other evidence Wolley could have had for the first part of this statement, but met with no success. On turning to the volume (for 1837) of the magazine cited, it was found—as one would expect—to have reference to the Dumfriesshire cyries, no allusion whatever being made to the Bass Rock.

I then applied to the late Prof. Alfred Newton, who edited Wolley's notes, but he could not throw any light on the subject; and after a good deal of barren searching in the pages of likely literature, I could only come to the conclusion that Wolley had in this instance probably made some mistake. The paragraphs in which the statement appears were written by him in 1853 for Hewitson's use. The statement is repeated—again without any indication of its origin—in the first volume of the 4th edition of 'Yarrell,' and of course it has since found its way into other publications. The idea of a pair of Sea-Eagles having their eyrie on the Bass makes a strong appeal to the imagination, and naturally writers of articles on the bird-life of the famous Rock like to introduce it. Its re-statement quite recently in two articles in the daily press has revived my interest in the matter, and prompted me to send you this letter in case some member of the B.O.U. can solve my difficulty. Personally, the middle of a great Gannet colony does not appear to me to be a nesting-site quite suited to the tastes of the White-tailed Eagle. If Wolley had said St. Abb's Head, there would at least have been the "Earnsheugh," a cliff to the west of that point, to give colour to the assertion.

WILLIAM EVANS.

38 Morningside Park,
Edinburgh.
22 August, 1922.

A Correction.

SIR,—I wish to make the following correction to my paper, "The Birds of Tasso and adjoining Islands of the Rokelle River, Sierra Leone," in 'The Ibis' for April 1921, page 271: *for* Blue Flycatcher (*Platysteira cyanea*) *read* Blue Flycatcher (*Elminia longicauda*).

WILLOUGHBY P. LOWE.

Gorsemoor, Throwleigh,
Devon.
28 June, 1922.

Systema Avium.

The first half of the volume of the 'Systema Avium' dealing with the Ethiopian Region, and compiled by Mr. W. L. Selater, is now completed, and is being passed for printing by the Special Committees of the B. O. U. and A. O. U. Before, however, actually going to press, the Committee of the B. O. U. wish to ascertain what number of members of the Union and others are likely to subscribe for it, as the price must depend to a great extent on the number of copies sold. The cost of printing the volume will be considerable, and the Committee are afraid that, unless they are well supported by the members, they will not be able to finance the work. A blank form of subscription will be found in the present number of 'The Ibis'; this form members and others are invited to fill up and return to the Hon. Secretary. It is impossible at present to fix the exact price of the complete volume dealing with the Ethiopian Region, but the Committee believe that it should not exceed £2 2s. 0d. They hope they may be able to fix the price at considerably less.

Another Ringed Swallow in S. Africa.

Mr. Witherby records (Brit. Birds, xvi. 1922, p. 81) the recovery of another ringed Swallow in southern Africa, making six in all. This individual was ringed as a nestling in Berkshire on 20 August, 1921, by Mr. A. Mayall, and recovered on 8 January, 1922, by Mr. E. Greeff, near Jensenville, in eastern Cape Province. It is a remarkable fact that all the Swallows hitherto recovered in South Africa are from the eastern half of the continent, and it will be interesting to discover the line of migration, whether by the east coast or the west coast or along the Nile valley.